

Not just when the world is ending by Jancys_Blue_Bayou

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M

Language: English

Characters: Chester the Dog (Stranger Things), Dustin Henderson, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers & Lucas Sinclair, Jonathan Byers & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Jonathan Byers & Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Nancy Wheeler & Will Byers, Jonathan Byers & Will Byers, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Mike Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-09-05

Updated: 2018-09-05

Packaged: 2022-04-23 02:34:50

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 6,443

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

After the exorcism in the cabin, after the gate closing, Will is in the hospital, Joyce is reeling from the loss of Bob and Jonathan just tries to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders as he takes care of his family while simultaneously dealing with being in love with the girl of his dreams. With Nancy by his side and with a little help from his friends he manages to figure out how to be in two places at once as they move through the chaos to a new normal.

Not just when the world is ending

Author's Note:

Okay so originally this started with me combining two super-old anon prompts: "i just want the most clingy, cuddly, cute jonathan with nancy on rainy day fic:) (you are the best omg ily)" and "byers family fluff idea: joyce gets chester the dog as a puppy to cheer up jonathan after the rabbit incident. jonathan, being the awesome older brother he is, lets will name the pup. (also, lonnie can go to hell.)" but since I am insane and obsessive it somehow, in a way I'm not quite sure how, morphed from a cute little fluff idea into 6500 words of Jonathan dealing with everything. (Okay I know how, it started me thinking it'd be cute to set the prompts during the early stages of their relationship... then I realized that damn they have a lot going on during that time...) Anyway enjoy, lots of Jancy bonding and a little Jonathan bonding with Lucas, Max, Mike, Hopper... Will's in here too... and some other stuff.

Will is in the hospital. But he's okay. He's alive and not... possessed. The world is crazy but no longer at the brink of an apocalyptic event. So that's good. Jonathan feels slightly haywire from just being there in the middle of all the chaos. But he's not the one who was possessed by a demon. He was not the one who were there to witness the full extent of said possession. And he wasn't the one to see their significant other be gruesomely killed and eaten by demonic monsters. So he has to be steady, he has to remain calm, be stable. For Will, for Mom. But while Mom lost a significant other, he might've gained one. It's weird, in the midst of all the chaos and horrific turn of events, there was also one turn which has been one of the greatest in his life. Over the past 24+ hours he and Nancy have been as close as two people can physically, mentally and emotionally be. If it wasn't for the whole brother and mother almost dying and an apocalypse nearly happening, he feels like he could've basked more in the glory of it. He's been in love with Nancy for like a year almost.

Sleeping together, being that close with her was of course amazing. But even greater was admitting their feelings to each other in bed that night, after. They're teenagers in love. Normally that should amount to a blissful carefree time. But that's not their lives. Instead it's much more than that.

The whole getting-the-demon-out-of-Will-with-a-firepoker-and-saving-Will-his-mom-and-everyone-else-in-the-world thing is something in and of itself. He will never ever be able to repay her for that action or even thank her enough for it. How can you when it's the single greatest thing anyone's ever done, saving his family and by extension the whole world? It's just impossible. But even aside from that. Everything before that. And everything after. In the car on the drive home from Murray they talked. Really talked. She told him she was "done with retreating from who I really am and what I really want to do". Then she told him what she wants is to be with him. And be there for him. He told her the same, that he'd like to be with her too, be there for her. But he couldn't think too much about it then even though it's all he wanted. And she could tell he was worried about his mom and Will since he hadn't been able to get a hold of them. She insisted on coming with him to his house to make sure they were alright. When they weren't, she stuck by his side like glue. All the way through it. It made all the difference. Nancy is all the difference. Trust issues? Well, maybe still but as he told Nancy in the car, he trusts her, Will and his mom. She smiled and said he should trust himself too.

And she's continued to stick by him. She came with them to the hospital and didn't leave until they realized it was morning and she could barely remember what lie she had sold her mom on so many hours before. She went to school. Somehow, she went to school after everything. First she grabbed her little brother and the rest of the kids – who for some reason he's not too sure about came in with a beat-up Steve. He's going to have to ask Nancy about that later because he's sure she got an explanation out of them as she took them home. Steve remained in the hospital for a few hours, got checked out by lunch with a mild concussion, he came by Will's room quickly and asked how they were doing. He told Steve and asked what the hell happened to him, Steve only awkwardly explained it with "a run in with that new kid Hargrove" before leaving.

Jonathan's not quite sure who the hell Hargrove is.

Soon as school let out, Nancy came back, with Mike in tow. While the boys caught up she pulled him with her out into the corridor and asked him how he was doing. He told her that Will was going to be okay but had to remain in the hospital for a few days, that he was also concerned with his mom, most acutely the fact that he has no idea when she last slept, and that he also is concerned by the fact that he doesn't want to leave the hospital but at the same time has to go by the house. Fix it up, feed Chester, pick up some stuff. He wants to be in two places at once. She looked like she was about to say so many things to him at once but instead furrowed her brow like she does when she's thinking, scheming, planning and then just said:

"Well, let's get to it then. You're not alone in this, Jonathan. I'll help. We'll break it down."

Then she, rationally, suggested they'd put a pin in the whole mom-doesn't-sleep-anymore issue for now. Then she asked him if he felt okay with momentarily leaving Will and his mom since Will was doing better. He said yes. Then she kissed him on the cheek and smiled. And it made him smile, a tiny little smile but nonetheless. It reminded him that though his life is chaos at the moment and the world is insane, it's not all bad. They went back inside the room and explained they would go back to the house to take care of stuff. She told Mike to get up and come with them because it was "all hands on deck" and Mike didn't grumble, just rolled his eyes at his sister barking orders at him. Meanwhile he asked Will to name whatever he wanted him to bring back with him.

Which is how they now find themselves in his car again. He behind the wheel and Nancy beside him. Only now they've got Mike in the back.

"So are you two dating now or what?" He suddenly throws out, in that I-don't-really-care-you-know-but-whatever tone of voice 13 year olds perfect.

He's caught off-guard.

"Mike!" Nancy hisses and quickly glances to him, seemingly trying to send an apology to him through her eyes, for what he's really not sure. "We... with everything happening how is that important I- we... technically we haven't been on a date so I don't know if you'd call it dating but we... I mean..."

Nancy struggles to explain their situation to Mike. She keeps glancing at him throughout, seemingly wary to say too much or anything he'd not agree on. She's trying to give him space, he realizes. Not pressure him since they haven't really been able to talk post... near-apocalypse. Guarding herself, themselves, in case anything would have changed for him since their talk in the car. Well it hasn't, at least for him. For him, it's only strengthened it, the bond he feels to Nancy. So he decides to let her know. He tentatively reaches for her hand on the seat. She instinctively laces their fingers together and glances up at him again. He looks her in the eye and she seems to understand. He nods. She nods.

"I mean we're together," Nancy then says to Mike, with more finality.

"Yes," he adds with another short nod.

"So there. Happy now?" Nancy huffs.

"Cool," Mike shrugs. He takes that as a strong endorsement, coming from a moody 13 year old. Nancy too seems a little surprised by Mike's reaction. "Just don't suck face in front of me and Will," Mike then adds.

That's more like it. Nancy rolls her eyes before piping up with a comeback.

"I can make no such promises."

Mike makes gagging noises at that. Then it's quiet the rest of the car ride. His hand never leaves hers.

They step inside his house to find blood on the living room floor, knocked over furniture and debris from what looks like crushed plates. They left the house in a state but not that state.

"What the hell happened here?" Nancy asks Mike.

"I told you, Max's psycho step-brother came here looking for her and attacked Lucas so Steve fought him and got his ass kicked before Max used the syringe to knock Billy out. Then we took his car to execute the plan," Mike explains. That's a lot of info to process in one go.

"With Max driving," Nancy shakes her head a little. "Well, at least you guys are okay. But wait you just left Billy here?"

"Yeah, what were we supposed to do?" Mike shrugs.

"Well where is he now?"

"Suppose he left when he woke up," Mike shrugs again.

"Wait so who is Billy?" He has to ask.

"That douchy new senior with the ridiculous hair and big car to overcompensate for other stuff," Nancy explains. He's not much wiser, he hasn't really paid attention to new people in school recently.

"Uh... okay. But is Lucas alright? And uh, Max?" He's worried. He saw Steve, after all.

"Yeah, they're fine, you don't have to worry about them," Nancy tells him and squeezes his hand.

"Okay," he says, letting it slide for now but he can't let it go completely. Some psycho attacked Lucas? That's not cool. Looking over the chaos in the living room he sighs. "Well uh, gotta clean this up but we'll need to re-carpet later... again."

"We'll help," Nancy nods.

When they walk into the kitchen they find Chester eating ham off the floor. Other assorted groceries spread out around him.

"What the hell..." he starts.

"Mike what the hell did you guys-" Nancy starts as she walks over to the fridge. "FUCK!" she cuts herself off and instinctively recoils once she's opened it. He automatically jumps in front of her, ready to ward

off whatever it is that made the toughest person in the world jump back. He looks. There's a... Demogorgon... Demodog...? In his fridge.

"Oh yeah, sorry I forgot about that," Mike casually says while petting Chester.

"What the fuck is *that thing* doing in the fridge?!" Nancy demands an answer off her little brother.

"It wasn't me who put it there, it was Dustin and Steve. Ask them," Mike shrugs.

"Well... good thing he's eaten at least," he says, crouching down to scratch Chester behind the ear. But he can't help glance around at the now spoiled products. Eggs, milk, butter, greens... he adds going shopping to his laundry list of tasks he needs to get done. He feels Nancy look from him to the groceries and back to him.

"I goddamn will," she then says, firmly, and marches over to the phone. Or, where the phone is supposed to be. She stops dead in her tracks.

"Didn't you rip it off the wall? Dustin said so," Mike says and glances to where they now see it wrecked on the floor.

"Right... forgot about that," Nancy answers, looking guilty. "Sorry, it started ringing when..."

"It's fine," he tells her.

"I'll replace it," she says.

"You don't have to-"

"I'll replace it," she cuts him off. She won't back down.

"Okay."

He opens the backdoor to let Chester out. Nancy marches back out to the car and comes back with their walkie-talkie.

"Chief, come in?" She tries when it crackles to life. Channel still set

to the one he radioed in the night to tell Hopper that it was time to close the gate. "Chief are you there?"

"What?" Hopper's familiar grumpy voice answers after a few seconds. "What do you want kid?"

"How is El doing?" Nancy asks.

"Good, she's resting. Is that all?"

"No, we've got a dead Demodog on our hands here. What do you want us to do with it?"

Several seconds of silence. Then a deep sigh and Hopper's tired voice again.

"... I'll be right over."

"Over and out," Nancy finishes. She then turns to Mike. "You got your walkie with you?"

"SuperComm," Mike corrects. Nancy rolls her eyes. "But yes."

"Get a hold of your friends, and Steve if he's in condition to move," Nancy orders. "We've got a lot of work to do and they're in it with us."

"Fine," Mike rolls his eyes right back at her.

They've cleaned up the worst of it in the kitchen, having thrown out the ruined food, written up a grocery list and swept the floor by the time they hear Hopper's truck rumble into the driveway. Soon after Lucas and Max drop in on a bike and skateboard, respectively, and then Dustin and Steve arrives in the latter's car.

"Alright let's make this quick, I've got Jane sleeping in the car," Hopper grumbles. They all peek inside to see the girl sleeping in the back in a nest of pillows and blankets. "Where she'll remain sleeping," he adds, glaring at Mike.

"Fine," Mike huffs. "Is she okay?"

"Yes, just drained," Hopper answers in a slightly softer tone. "Where is this thing?" He then asks.

"In the fridge," Nancy answers.

"What? Why is it there?" Hopper looks at them in disbelief.

"Yeah, why?" Nancy crosses her arms and challenges Dustin and Steve. Steve awkwardly shuffles his feet and looks down.

"It's an important scientific discovery, we needed to preserve it," Dustin tries to explain.

"Kid, first of all do you know how cold a morgue is? Shove a corpse into a fridge won't do a jack thing to preserve it. Second of all, are you guys insane or stupid or both?" Hopper, clearly exasperated, explains, glaring at Dustin and Steve.

"Third of all I don't know how your mothers raised you but I'm pretty sure it's bad etiquette to shove a dead monster into someone else's fridge without asking. Plus you ruined all their food!" Nancy adds.

"We... we didn't think. Sorry. Sorry man," Steve apologizes to him.

"It's... fine," he answers.

"Alright, knuckleheads, go get it out of there, put it in the trunk of my car," Hoppers orders.

"Yes Chief," Steve answers and drags Dustin with him.

"How's Will doing?" Hopper then asks him.

"Better, he's resting," he answers.

"Joyce?"

"Not so much."

Hopper slowly nods, then puts a hand on his shoulder.

"Keep me posted. Let me know if you need help, I'll swing by when I can," he then says.

"I will," he nods.

"Okay, I'll take care of this," Hopper says when the Demodog has been loaded into the trunk of his car. "I'll be in touch," he parts with and leaves them all standing in the driveway while he takes off in the cruiser again, to do God knows what with the Demodog.

"Okay. We're going to fix this place up as best we can as fast as possible so Jonathan can get back to the hospital," Nancy takes over. "You two," she turns to Steve and Dustin. They both stand up straight. "Since you're responsible for it, you guys are going to go grocery shopping to replace everything you ruined."

"Come on-" Dustin starts to protest.

"That's fair. Come on Dipshit," Steve cuts him off and gets out his car keys.

"Hold it," Nancy stops them. "You're not driving, Steve. Hand them over," she beckons for the car keys.

"Nance, I'm fine-"

"No you're not. You're concussed. You're not driving. Can't believe you drove here, I assumed you guys would walk or get a ride. Jesus. Give me the keys, I'm driving. We got another stop to make anyway."

Steve sighs and throws his keys to Nancy who catches them mid-air before continuing.

"You guys," she points at Mike, Lucas and Max. "Help Jonathan clean up, do whatever he says. We'll be back soon."

The aforementioned trio nods and starts to head back inside. Steve and Dustin starts to step away towards Steve's car. He himself lingers in the driveway. Nancy turns to him and once again grabs his hand.

"Hey. We'll get this done in no time. We'll be back soon."

"Right. Thanks."

"No problem. What's Will's favorite candy?"

"Reese's Pieces," he answers automatically.

"Alright. What's your favorite candy?" Nancy then smiles.

"What? You don't have to-" He starts to protest.

"What's your favorite candy?" She insists.

"Twizzlers."

"Nice. Anything else you need?"

"No. Thanks," he tells her.

"Alright. See you soon," she smiles at him again. And kisses his cheek again before walking over to Steve's car. He heads back inside, trying to collect his thoughts as to how to clean up, rather than thinking of how Nancy seems to end all of their conversations with a cheek kiss now and how amazing that is.

Inside he finds the younger trio standing around, seemingly waiting for orders.

"Okay uh... Mike could you start with just gathering up all the drawings? While the rest of us... well for starters let's open up all the windows and doors to air out, this whole place smells like dead Demodog."

They nod and get to work. Working mostly in silence they fall into a nice rhythm with their cleanup. He tasks Mike with finishing up in the kitchen, Max with cleaning the hallway and Lucas to help him clear up in the living room while he himself sets to work on the blood stains with a bottle of bleach. He glances up at Lucas who's collecting all the chards from the crushed dinner plate. The younger boy seems fine, but he can't help but worry.

"Hey uh, you okay? I heard what happened here," he tentatively asks. Lucas looks up.

"Oh, yeah... Yeah, I'm alright. Thanks man," he answers.

"He went after you?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"Uh... he saw me with Max... He doesn't even like Max, and she hates him but still, seeing me with her apparently..."

"Racist coward..." he shakes his head. He can't really wrap his head around the fact there's a guy around here who jumps a 13 year old kid. "If he bothers you again... let me know, okay?"

"We think he'll back off. Max swung a nail-bat at his balls," Lucas tells him.

"Wow, yeah that'll... that should shake a guy," he admits, raising his eyebrows. "But still..."

"Yeah. Yeah, I'll let you know. Thanks Jonathan," Lucas nods.

He's done all he can to the blood stains now. They probably will have to re-carpet again anyway. Going out into the hallway to put the bleach away he bumps into Max who's just finishing vacuuming up.

"Thanks," he tells her, then thinks for a second. "Hey come with me I could use some help."

The girl follows him out back where Chester still is. The dog immediately comes up to him for pets. He stops in his tracks to grant the dog's wish.

"So we need to find something to board up the window the Demodog flew through until I can fix it for real," he explains to Max. Tries to ignore how much that'll cost. "Help me look through the pile there," he points towards the pile of junk they cleared out of the shed last night.

"Sure thing," the girl nods.

"Oh, by the way uh, nice to meet you, Max," he awkwardly adds, realizing he never really greeted the girl last night. There was a lot

going on. "I'm Jonathan."

"I know," Max answers with a slight chuckle. "Nice to meet you too. And this was Chester, right?" She continues and bends down to pet the dog who's loving the attention after not getting any last night.

"Yeah."

"Cool. I love dogs. So, Will is doing better?" She asks as they walk over to the junk pile, Chester at their heels.

"Yeah, but they'll keep him for at least another night, maybe more."

"Cool. I like him. He and Lucas are the nicest of the boys," Max says.

"Cool. So you just moved here?"

"Yeah. From California."

"Nice. So how did you end up falling in with those guys," he asks with a small smile.

"Eh, I don't really know. They're total nerds but... not the worst. And then I got roped into all this shit. It's crazy but... kind of cool too," Max explains.

"Yeah it's crazy alright," he can agree with that at least. "So... Billy is your step brother?" He carefully prods.

"Yep. I hate him," Max answers curtly.

"Yeah he sounds like an asshole. Is he... I mean, does he give you trouble?" He continues his awkward, tentative prodding.

Max doesn't say anything to that.

"You don't have to tell me," he hurriedly says. "Just... if he is... or anyone else... it's just... I know what it's like... I know. And if you need any help... I'm here," he continues. He doesn't want to force her into telling him anything. But she has to know that.

Max looks at him, considering him carefully, it seems.

"You know?" She then quietly challenges.

"Dad," he simply says. Max nods.

"Okay," she then says.

"I mean, Lucas told me how you handled him. Real badass," he tells her. Max smirks a little. "But just know if in the future he tries anything... I can help," he continues.

"You will? Why?" Max challenges again.

"Because you're Will's friend and you're 13 and no 13 year old should have to deal with people like Billy," he lays it out.

"Okay," Max says again. Seems to mull it over. "I'll let you know," she adds after careful consideration.

"Good."

"Hey, how about this?" Max changes topic by holding up a piece of plywood she just dug out of the pile.

"Yeah, that'll do. Nice work," he tells her after inspecting it.

They head back inside, beckoning Chester with them.

"Hey I found a can of air-freshener in the bathroom and sprayed the crap out of this place," Mike tells them as they wander into the kitchen who looks in a much better state now.

"Oh, okay good. Thanks."

Mike and Max follow him into the living room where they find that Lucas has swept up the broken glass and all the rest.

"Nice job, thanks," he tells him. "Hey hold this," he continues, handing over the sheet of plywood to Lucas while he goes to find a hammer and some nails.

Once he's found the needed items they walk outside. Lucas holds the plywood in place while he nails. He takes aim.

"So Nancy's with you now?" Lucas suddenly asks. He promptly misses the nail. Thankfully, he misses his own thumb too.

"Sorry man, just asking," Lucas says.

"Yes, me and Nancy are... together," he answers. It still feels weird saying it. But in a good way.

"Cool. I don't get why you weren't already," Lucas continues.

"You know, to be honest neither do we, really," he answers while nailing up the plywood.

"By the way where were you guys?" Lucas then asks.

"Sesser, Illinois," he shortly answers.

"Doing what?" Lucas prods.

"Jesus I don't want to know!" Mike calls out behind them.

"I didn't mean that!" Lucas hurriedly deflects.

"Getting justice against the Lab," he quickly answers instead to get past the awkwardness.

"What does that mean?" Mike asks.

"You'll see soon enough."

They've just finished boarding up the window when Nancy, Steve and Dustin returns. Nancy comes right up to him, holding a box with a picture of a phone on the front. Steve and Dustin hangs back, holding bags of groceries.

"Hey, how's it gone?" She asks, putting a hand on his back before sliding it down to grasp his hand again. She does that all the time now. Touches him. And he can't help but notice how natural it feels. How good it feels. How he wants her to always touch him, just a hand in his is enough. It's everything.

"Good, we're almost done. I just have to get Will's stuff," he tells her. Looking at the box in her hand, he continues. "You really didn't have to do that."

"I broke it. I replaced it, it's only fair. Don't fight me more on this," she tells him, and he knows better than to try.

"Thanks," he tells her instead. "And thank you guys," he turns to Steve and Dustin.

"No problem man, sorry again about uh, that. It was stupid," Steve answers.

They all head inside. He puts away the groceries, except for the candy which he puts in his bag. He goes to Will's room to collect the stuff he requested. Nancy follows him while the others jointly assigns themselves the task of hooking up the new phone. Nancy stands in the doorway watching him as he digs through Will's comic books, locating the specific ones he asked for.

"So is there anything else you need help with?" She asks.

"Uh... not right now," he answers while getting Will's crayons and pad of paper.

"Sure?" She challenges.

"Uh... yeah," he automatically answers, he can't think of much now.

"What about Chester?" She then poses.

"Oh... uh I'll just go back quickly later to walk him and-" he starts answering. He hadn't thought of that but what else is there to do, he doesn't like having to leave the hospital again later but he'll just have to quickly go home, walk him, feed him and then get back.

But Nancy interrupts him, stepping forward, right to him and gently taking hold of his arms.

"Jonathan... let me help. You want to be in two places at once. But you can't. So let me be in the other. You should be with Will and your mom, let me take care of Chester until you guys get home," she

sweetly tells him.

"You don't have to do that, you've done more than enough I-" he tries, but she stops him again.

"No no, come on now. It's no big deal. You carry the world on your shoulders. Let me at least do this tiny thing for you, so you can be with them," she insists, looking deep into his eyes.

"O-okay," he hesitantly answers. He doesn't want her to have to do so much for him but he has to admit it's the best solution. He can't be in two places at once.

"Jonathan, are we a team?" She then challenges.

"Yes," he quickly answers. Of course they are. They hunt monsters together. They take down the Man together. He'll do anything for her. She *has* done everything for him.

"I think so too. So let me do this. We're not just a team when the world's about to end. We're always a team now," she tells him with conviction. He slowly nods in agreement. "Big or small, we're a team. Whether it's hunting a monster or walking your dog so you can be there for your family, I've got your back," she continues.

"I've got your back, always," he quickly tells her.

"I know," she smiles at him. Then she hugs him.

She wraps her arms around him and holds him close. He puts his arms around her and pulls her in even closer. He buries his face in her shoulder. The embrace is warm, comfortable, *safe*. He breathes out. Dares to relax in her arms. He breathes in. Her scent calms him. Nancy smells of Nancy, that's the only way he can describe it and it's heavenly. For a moment he allows himself to let go of all his worries, to not think about how Will is doing, how mom is holding up, everything that still needs fixing, all the expenses hanging over them; and instead just think of Nancy. It makes his heart beat faster. How amazing she is. How strong she is, how smart, how brave, how daring, how kind, how funny, how sweet, how much she cares. How she thinks, how she feels, how she moves, how she speaks, how she

listens.

"I love you."

It just slips out. He doesn't think. He just... feels it, so strongly, in that moment and it just slips out, he murmurs it right by her ear. Her hand, which was rubbing circles on his back comes to a halt and he realizes what he just said. Fuck. He just screwed everything up. He wants to backtrack. He doesn't really want to take it back because he meant it, with every fiber of his being he meant it, but at the same time he knows that even if he generally has no idea what he's doing with this stuff, he knows that it's probably way too soon to say stuff like that to the person you sort of just today confirmed was your girlfriend.

She pulls back slightly, but doesn't let go of him. She looks at him, looks him in the eye. She somehow doesn't seem freaked out. He can actually make out a slight blush rising on her cheeks as she searches his eyes. Then she kisses him. It's a sweet kiss. He can feel her lips turn upwards against his, she's smiling into it.

"I love you too. So much," she whispers after their lips break apart. She looks so deep into his eyes when she says it. He's never felt closer to another person. "Don't ever forget that," she adds and kisses his cheek.

He'll try not to.

Will has been home from the hospital now for almost a week. Things have started to calm down. Well, for them. Quite the contrary for the Lab. Their story broke a few days ago and so far it has had exactly the desired effect. The Lab is in shambles, they're off scot-free. Will is feeling better. His mom is still reeling from the loss of Bob, but at least she's sleeping now. And Hopper's helped him fix the window

and pay the medical bills with money he demanded off that Dr. Owens he's still in contact with. That's helped. So, things are looking up. He feels calmer, lighter, happier. With Nancy by his side.

It's kind of crazy, how much time they spend together. It's just so much better, being with her, than... not being with her. He picks her up before school, and there they share most of their classes and spend the lunch hour together in his car or in the darkroom. Then if he doesn't have work they go home, usually to his place. And just, hang out. She apologized to Will and his mom in the beginning, like if she was intruding, being there so much but they told her otherwise. They both adore Nancy. How can you not? So they spend the evenings together too. When he takes her home she tells him she doesn't really want to go. Most nights they sneak in through each other's windows.

There's still depressing stuff they have to deal with, like funerals for Barb and for Bob. He's still worried about his mom. But life is kind of... okay. Good, even. It feels weird to admit it, after everything. But overall, he can't deny that he's happy. And it's mostly because of the person walking next to him right now, hand in his, their fingers interlaced.

They're walking in the woods, Chester running around in front of them. It's quickly become a habit for them. Nancy walked Chester for the few days Will was in the hospital and soon declared to him that she loves the dog. And the feeling is very much mutual, every time Chester sees Nancy he happily darts over. So they naturally fell into walking Chester in the woods together now.

"Hey, question," Nancy suddenly pipes up after they've been walking in a comfortable silence for a while, enjoying each other's company and the crisp fall day.

"Yes?"

"When did you guys get Chester? You've never told me that."

"Oh. Well uh, remember I told you about my 10th birthday?" He starts.

"Of course," she immediately confirms, looking at him with

sympathetic eyes and brushing her thumb over the back of his hand.

Looking back, it's kind of amazing how he told her about that so quickly after they really started talking, over a year ago. It was just something about her already then which made him feel comfortable enough to let down his guard a bit, let someone in a little and share stuff like that, about one of the worst days of his life.

"Right so, after he made me shoot the rabbit I started to cry, I just bawled my eyes out and he got mad and dragged me home. Mom tried to console me while he went to the bar or something. But I didn't exaggerate when I said I cried for a week, I pretty much did. Mom tried everything. Will was just six but he tried to make me feel better too but I just felt so awful. I couldn't stop thinking about that poor animal... what I did to it..."

"What he made you do," Nancy cuts in firmly, squeezing his hand.

"Right. I didn't stop crying until one day mom came home with a puppy. Chester. Or, he didn't have a name then. He was so small. Mom got him from the shelter, he was a stray no one wanted. She told me he needed a home and lots of love and someone who could take care of him and that she thought no one would do it better than me."

"She was right."

"And he was the cutest little thing and he snuggled up in my lap and wouldn't move and his fur was so soft then. And I asked mom if she really thought so and she said yes. And I said I loved him already, because I did. But I had to ask again if she really was sure because... I had always wanted a dog but dad always said no, said we couldn't afford it. Mom said don't worry about it, that this little guy was here to stay. Me and Will played with him all day. When dad came home he took one look at Chester and I could see he was angry. Mom saw it too. So I took Will and the puppy outside to play while mom talked to dad. We could still hear them yelling so I asked Will what we should name the puppy, to take his mind off it. He came up with Chester then. I don't know where he got it from, but it fits. The yelling stopped and dad went off to the bar. Mom said it was settled, that we'd keep Chester. Dad grumbled and said it wasn't his dog so

he'd have no part in it. That was fine by me. I think mom sold some of her things to pay for dog food and stuff. I felt bad about that so I started mowing lawns and stuff then to help pay for that stuff."

He comes to a stop with his tale and at the same time to a stop with his walking, because Nancy has stopped. He looks at her. She's gazing up at him. She puts a hand on his cheek, tracing her thumb on it. She stands on her tip-toes and kisses him. For a long time. It's bliss. They don't break apart until they both feel Chester bump at their legs as the unruly dog happily presses himself in between them, wagging his tail and staring up at them. They giggle and pet him.

"You're the sweetest guy in the world, Jonathan," she tells him.

He's about to reply when suddenly the heavens open up and rain starts pouring down at an alarming rate. Nancy squeals and they start to run back towards his house with Chester but the sudden downpour still completely soaks them. Back inside they quickly shed their coats and boots. Mom is working, Will is lying on the couch, feet up on the coffee table and watching TV when they come in.

"Hey," he greets.

"Hey Will," Nancy smiles.

"Hey what happened to you?" Will chuckles a little at how they look.

"Suddenly started pouring down," he explains.

"Yeah it was crazy!" Nancy adds. She crouches down and scratches Chester behind the ear. "Nice to get out of the weather, right boy?" She asks the dog in a cute voice. He meanwhile steps a bit further away, exchanging a glance with Will. They both know what's coming. And sure enough, Chester promptly shakes the water out of his fur, further soaking Nancy who yelps.

"Rookie," Will laughs and he can't help but snicker. Nancy stands up and turns to him.

"You could've warned me," she dryly notes. He can tell she's trying to keep from chuckling at the situation too.

"You look like a wet cat," he observes.

"Watch it, kitty's got claws," she jokes.

He and Nancy head into his room to change out of their wet clothes. She borrows one of his sweaters and looks insanely cute in it. Granted, she looks insanely cute in anything, but still. He just has to pull her in for a kiss then, just for the cuteness. He finds himself having to do that a lot, and she always pleasantly giggles. They walk back out to the living room and settle on the couch next to Will. Nancy nestles into his side. Chester soon jumps up and settles across his lap, with his face in Nancy's. He pets him while Nancy strokes Chester's head and scratches him behind the ears. Will jokingly grumbles a little at the tail now wagging him right in the face.

"So Will, why Chester?" Nancy asks.

"Hm?" Will switches his attention from the TV showing Star Trek, to Nancy.

"Jonathan told me about when you guys got him, he said you were the one who named him. Why Chester?" She expands.

"Oh, I got it from Looney Tunes," Will explains.

"Looney Tunes?" He asks.

"Yeah, you don't remember? We had it on tape with a bunch of others. The one with the big bulldog Spike and the little terrier, Chester. It wasn't super-fun but I guess the name stuck for me."

"Oh yeah... Wow I'd forgotten that."

"Eh, we didn't watch it a lot. Think we liked Bugs Bunny more."

"Aw, that's so sweet, you two watching Looney Tunes together," Nancy coos. Will shrugs, he blushes a little.

Will returns his focus to the TV. Nancy and Chester somehow simultaneously cuddle further into him. Seems like just yesterday the world was ending. But he's never been so at ease, so comfortable. Will to his right, happy and doing good. Nancy to his left, pressed

right up against him, happy and carefree. And Chester sprawled across them all. He could get used to this.